

U. S. - Massachusetts - Boston

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT
OF
BOFFIN'S BOWER.

1883.



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OF

BOFFIN'S BOWER,

FROM MAY 30, 1882, TO MAY 30, 1883.



BOSTON:

FRANKLIN PRESS: RAND, AVERY, & COMPANY.

1883.

REPORT OF 1882-83.

THIRTEEN years have been completed of hard work in the interest of one of the most important classes in this community; and notwithstanding the deep interest felt, and the earnest effort to assist the working-girls wisely and well, it still remains a difficult and complicated problem, how to increase their wages in proportion to the cost of living, particularly as that depends upon the changes of fashion, the uncertainty of trade, the limited means of their employers, the disposition of patrons to purchase for less than value: in other words, to take an unfair advantage of the necessity of the weak and dependent.

LOW WAGES

has caused the most baneful results. I cannot describe them *all* in these pages.

It has been the cause of the early death of some of the purest and most beautiful young women. In the course of the last year, five in whom I was particularly interested died of consumption, and one committed suicide by drowning, — all under twenty-five years of age.

They could earn from three to four dollars per week. It would be impossible for them to get twenty-one of the plainest meals for less than three dollars: consequently

they had to resort to one meal, or a meal and a half, a day. A general breaking-up of the constitution, and quick consumption, finished the work of an overtasked and half-starved young girl before she had the vitality to withstand the strain upon her system.

Case after case applied to me in which the statement was, "The doctor says I am all run down, and must take a rest, or get some light work."

Employment for "invalids" is one of the banes of my life, as no person wishes to have their sympathies excited. Then the appeals to me are heart-rending, when I have to give their death-warrant; namely, that their days of work have come to an end. The answer is, "I cannot give up: it seems so hard to feel such an interest in life, and know that you *must* die."

Another phase of it I will not describe here, as that would be a dark chapter, in which every intelligent person must feel a deep apprehension, as it invades indirectly the most sacred interests of our well-being.

PROGRESS IS MERCILESS TO THE HUMAN RACE.

The girls who have succeeded in skilled labor find, in their experience in each year, the demand harder to meet, and more exhaustive to every nerve and tissue. As complete perfection can never be reached in any line of woman's work, they are compelled to improve in the kind, and increase in quantity day by day. The rushing, driving, imperious demand takes every effort to keep up from year to year. Good food they must have, and comfortable surroundings.

Their pleasure consists in keeping their health and strength in a condition to perform their duty. They are always to be found at home evenings, Sundays, and holidays, as that is the underlying principle which causes

success. They live by weight and measure. The highest wages are sixteen dollars; the lowest, five; and the average, nine. The largest number work by the piece; and the hours are usually from seven A.M. (eight is the latest), and all close at six P.M.

Their places of residence are, on an average, a mile, and a mile and a half, and two miles, from the shop. Their custom is to rise at five A.M., allow themselves so many minutes to dress, so many for breakfast, so many for each street through which they pass, as Charlestown, East Boston, Chelsea, and the north part of the city, are the homes of a great number. Haymarket and Scollay Squares are two of their landmarks. South Boston, Dorchester, and the Highlands send in a heavy delegation every morning.

Williams Market, the Providence Depot, and Park Street Church clocks tell them whether they are three minutes too late or have three minutes to spare.

Sometimes they ride in the horse-cars, but never more than one way for that short distance; and they always walk home to save expense.

The universal statement is, "If I should go out one evening to stay till nine o'clock, I should feel the consequence next day." By that severely rigid discipline of themselves, they can be depended on by their employers at all seasons of the year.

THE DIFFICULTY OF REACHING THAT STANDARD.

Of late years, it is the custom of ladies to make their own dresses, and buy their underwear ready made. They confine dressmaking to very large and fashionable establishments, and single individuals on a small scale; and so difficult is the work, that there are few who can possibly learn to do it satisfactorily. A dress has become a work of art, and, although the price for making is from

twenty-five to seventy-five dollars, it is not one cent more than it is worth.

The head of such an establishment has to possess all the attributes of a great ruler, so as to arrange the trimmers, fitters, and seamstresses, vary her styles, make up new patterns, and manage so that no one set will have to wait for another. When she obtains a skilled staff of workers, they must be kept together without a break, except by death or marriage.

It will be seen that the chances for a new hand are very limited.

THE MANUFACTURE OF UNDERWEAR

has become a very important industry within ten years, and is constantly being made cheaper and better.

The business rushes the year round, and the same hands are to be found at their places. Their fingers are so fine and deft, that the work is like magic, so delicate and beautiful to look at. A lady at the head of one of these departments told me that she was obliged to add a machine-operator. Sixty-six applied who had more or less experience, but not one could answer the purpose. Finally she picked out the brightest, and taught her.

At another large establishment of the kind, a girl applied to the foreman, and, although she had years of experience at the same kind of work, he hesitated about taking her; and she said, "Please do not say no, for this is the forty-eighth place I have applied in one month." He answered, "I was thinking how you could live for many weeks, as it would be like learning a new trade to work for us." True enough, three dollars was more than she could earn for a long time.

MANUFACTURE OF GOSSAMER CLOAKS

is an industry of a recent date, and, when first introduced, the girls made from two to three dollars a day ; but for two years they have suffered severely from the check in sales, and, at the present time, are improving somewhat.

SALESWOMEN.

The condition of the saleswomen has attracted a great deal of attention of late years.

In regard to their wages and cost of living, it still remains a vexed question. A competent saleswoman receives from six to twelve dollars per week : the average is six, and two dollars and a half the lowest. Their hours are from eight A.M. till six P.M. in the busy seasons.

By the majority of employers they are treated with kindness and consideration. Chairs are furnished, and *they are allowed*, when not engaged, to make use of them without running the risk of being *discharged* for some *trifling offence*. Nevertheless there is much abuse practised in the employment of saleswomen. One class of store-keepers pay three dollars per week ; the work begins at half-past seven in the morning ; they allow one half-hour for dinner, half-hour for supper ; then the girls are required to return in the evening, and remain till nine o'clock, except Saturday, when the day is prolonged till eleven. And what is most difficult to comprehend is the fact that working-people are the principal patrons to such an establishment.

THE MANUFACTURE OF CLOTHING

seems to be the best regulated and the most reliable occupation, although the test of ability is very severe.

The firm of Macullar, Parker, & Company, has been a

great factor in that direction. When it was started, over a quarter of a century ago, merchant-tailors shook their heads, and said, "A big concern of that kind must cripple the smaller ones;" which was by no means the case, as their system was a new one. They not only created their own patronage, but protected the smaller establishments by educating the public up to a higher standard of trade, and introducing the cash system. Previous to that, clothing manufacturers were obliged to give six months' and a year's credit, and charge their customers a margin, in order to cover losses. In the spring and fall it was impossible to make up a staff of good workers, as they had to be scattered between the seasons. Then came the terrible strain: to have a suit made on time for a customer who paid cash, the hands had to work till twelve and one o'clock at night. Other patrons consoled themselves by saying, "I know that I have to put up with disappointments, poor cloth, and a misfit, but that is the only place I can *get trusted*." The payments occurred at long periods in their workshops, and were rarely made in full, except to the experts. That discouraged and demoralized them. Macullar, Parker, & Company established a strict "cash" trade, steady work the year round, and prompt weekly payments.

The wisdom of that measure, established so long ago, can be appreciated, when it is remembered that one of the hardest-fought battles of the Legislature last winter was to enact a law to compel the general practice. The majority of the people have grown up with the firm, and the feeling of security and justice has developed their ambition and their best efforts: consequently they can be depended upon to fill an order within an hour of the time assigned. Added to that, the perfection of fit, the great varieties in goods, the novelties in style and perfect elegance, have

made it a pleasure to order a new suit; and a gentleman has four a year on an average, instead of two. Nor would they wear the horrible botched suits of the past two decades. As the work is so particular, *they have to teach all their own hands*, so that vacancies rarely occur. The large firms in the ready-made clothing are, ISAAC FENNO & COMPANY, 28 Summer Street; MINER, BEALE, & COMPANY, corner of Summer and Chauncy Streets; RHODES & RIPLEY, 99 Summer Street; GEORGE W. SIMMONS & COMPANY, 32 to 44 North Street. And many others give employment to a great number; but as they are reliable houses, and pay promptly, their hands work for them ten, fifteen, and twenty years, and it is very rare that they have to take in new applicants, except the friends of the employees themselves.

THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK OF THE BOWER

is to furnish such labor as the applicants can do, to give them advice and encouragement in all trying afflictions, to give them clothing when they need it, food when they are hungry and have no money to pay for it. Under that head comes every phase of human misery. The struggles of poor women, old and young, sick and well, strong and weak, educated and uneducated, have come to me within the last year for assistance of one kind or another.

IN THE MANUFACTURE

of shoes, hats, furs, trimmings, and cloaks, it is almost impossible for any but an experienced hand to get an engagement, except where they give the poorest pay, and in that case the seasons are always short. It is not uncommon for forty and upwards to be discharged from one shop on a Saturday night, without a dollar to support a week's idleness. Then they get into debt, and suffer hardship

to the extent that is unknown to any class but women. To meet that emergency, for nine years, through the assistance of friends, I have been enabled to give them free dinners during the severest part of the winter. The last year thirty-one hundred and fifty meals were furnished, and in many cases that was all they had for the day. It consisted of meat, vegetables, bread, tea, etc.

The number of employers from May 30, 1882, to May 30, 1883, either in person or by letter, were ten hundred and fifty-three, and the number of applicants for employment, sixteen hundred and four.

That includes widows, mothers, grandmothers, school-teachers, nurses, saleswomen, whose health is broken down, and very young girls who should have been at school, but were obliged to do something, as their fathers and brothers were out of work. The number of half-invalids is one in seven, who cannot do enough to support themselves wholly; but the majority are able-bodied. In that case, I find no difficulty in procuring housework, if they can wash, iron, and cook. Such employment is always abundant.

POORLY PAID SHOP-GIRLS.

The class in whom I am particularly interested are the "poorly paid-shop girls," whose seasons are short; and they must be provided for. Last winter a very nice young girl, whose mother was dead, and father made sea-voyages. helped to keep a home for a younger brother and sister. She came six miles to her work every morning, and was employed making "Jersey sacks" at twenty-five cents apiece. She could finish six a week.

I found a good place for her; and she was so ingenious and ambitious, that, in less than two months, she could earn ten dollars per week, by which she is enabled to keep a

delightful little home for herself and her motherless brother and sister. She starts for work every morning very cheerfully at half-past five, riding both ways in the horse-cars.

Another case that was deeply impressive was that of two lame girls, who had formed a very strong friendship for each other in consequence of their infirmity. It has existed without interruption for the last eleven years. They formed a co-partnership in work and housekeeping, occupied two rooms at twelve dollars a month. By saving a little from year to year, they had two hundred dollars in the bank. Finally they were compelled to be idle so much during the last two years, that they drew it out, dollar for dollar, as they had put it in; and they not only contracted a debt, but half starved themselves upon one meal a day.

In that dilemma they came to me. I gave them ten dollars each. It paid all they owed, and they found good work and weekly payments at the time.

They offered to refund the money; but I had not the heart to accept it, in view of the physical suffering they endured every moment of their existence.

During the last year I have had extreme cases enough to fill a volume, for which no provision is made by existing laws or charitable institutions, that I am aware of. They are women who are in feeble health, who are frequently taken into a shop out of compassion, as their appeals are impossible to resist. One will work hard for two dollars per week, while the girl who sits by her side earns seven.

The following appeals and responses, taken from the "Herald" and "Journal" respectively, will show that there is a deep well-spring of human sympathy when properly reached:—

A DESERVING CASE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD. — A poor, sick girl called upon me to-day, who has worked in this city for the last ten years, but at present is in very feeble health. She is able to earn about two dollars per week in a tailor-shop, finishing coats, and pays one dollar a week for her room. Her board consists of baker's bread, and for three weeks past she couldn't afford a particle of butter upon it, and she has not tasted meat for three months. She is too feeble to take a place to do housework, and so much discouraged, she feels, that, if she goes to an institution, she will never come out alive. Contributions for her benefit would be well bestowed, as she is a worthy young woman, and the case seems to be one of gradual starvation. I shall be happy to receive the funds for her, or give her address to any one wishing to call.

JENNIE COLLINS, 1031 Washington Street.

THAT "DESERVING CASE."

GENEROUS RESPONSE TO THE APPEAL FOR AID. — OTHER CHANCES FOR CHARITY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD. — The response in behalf of the "deserving case," which appeared in last Sunday's HERALD, was most gratifying in all respects. A silver dollar was sent to her at eight o'clock Sunday morning, and five dollars in the afternoon. The first mail Monday brought ten dollars in various sums; then came a lady with jelly and other delicacies, and another lady called with a basket of home-made bread, fresh butter and eggs, cooked by her own hands. A gentleman who had lost his wife a few months before came to offer her the clothing "his loved one will never need." A lady living in the suburbs offered to pay her car-fare out and in, that she might have good air and plenty of food through the day, and come to her room at night. A gentleman who called with his contribution said, "After I had read that piece I could not eat my dinner." A lady who is in affluence at the present time, came to offer assistance, and said, "That piece made my heart ache. I have lived just so myself, and know how to pity her." Many distinguished ladies and gentlemen called in regard to the case, including one of the most highly esteemed and well-beloved leading ladies of the Boston stage. She added to her charming presence a contribution. Fifty-one

letters came, either to convey money or to make inquiries in regard to the case, all expressing the tenderest sympathy and ardent "desire to do something." The poor girl received ninety-three dollars and seventy-five cents in sums from twenty-five cents to ten dollars. At first she was completely overcome, and broke down, and wept like a child. She then insisted on giving five dollars from her own munificence to another poor girl in whom I am interested, who is also in feeble health, trying hard to work when she should have tender nursing. The latter has survived one whole week upon fifty cents' worth of food. The first poor girl is well provided for at present. She has been invited by a generous family to go out of town, and remain there three weeks, where she can have good food and rest. The following note will show how deeply she appreciates the effort in her behalf:—

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD.—Many thanks to the kind ladies and gentlemen for the generous contribution. I feel that I cannot thank you enough, for it has been a joy and a help to me; but your reward will be above. I shall probably not meet them in this world, but hope to in the next, where we will not know pain or trouble; where we will be under the care of one loving Father.

THE POOR SICK GIRL.

This is but one of hundreds of cases in this city equally deserving.

JENNIE COLLINS.

BOFFIN'S BOWER.

A DESERVING CASE

Of a young widow who has taken care of herself and little boy by hard work from the time he was two weeks old till now. As she is extremely young, and of slight physique, her health gradually became impaired by hard work. Her friends have urged her to give away her little one; but she preferred to stitch at the machine until she would drop dead, rather than part with him. He is a darling little fellow, with golden curls and blue eyes, beloved by all who know him. The brave little woman has been obliged to succumb at last from overwork. To spare her life she must have some weeks rest, and proper food and nourishment for herself and child. She is one of the many heroines of which the world has little knowledge. I shall be very happy to receive any contributions that may be forwarded for her benefit, and explain further particulars.

JENNIE COLLINS, 1031 Washington Street.

A SUCCESSFUL APPEAL.

The response to the appeal in behalf of the young widow was exceedingly gratifying. The first contribution was from a journalist of the Boston press. Another gentleman, who gave ten dollars, said, "It has opened our hearts." A lady sent a note for ten dollars for the widowed mother of the blue-eyed boy. Her only signature was "A Mother." Five dollars were forwarded from a little girl with golden curls, named Ruth, that was placed in the child's bank for future emergency. A number of letters were received, all expressing much sympathy for the brave little woman, and her blue-eyed boy with golden curls. Two were particularly impressive, — one enclosing twenty-five cents; the other, five two-cent postage-stamps. Many contributions were received; but the greatest number were in sums of one and two dollars. The aggregate up to date is seventy dollars and thirty-five cents, which has enabled me to secure a boarding-place for the mother and child with a very kind lady, where she has the best of care, and the little one is the pet of the house. She fully appreciates the generosity and sympathy in answer to the appeal. Responses were received from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.

JENNIE COLLINS, 1031 Washington Street.

BOFFIN'S BOWER.

The poor women never ask me for money, but come as they would to a friend; and in many cases, when I learn their condition, money is the only thing that would do them any good. The smallest sum given was five dollars, and the largest twenty.

One was a young girl whose eye was injured by a broken machine-needle. She was compelled to be idle for many weeks, and returned to work with a heavy debt, and tried to live upon one meal a day till it was paid. She was the recipient of twenty dollars, and at the present time is doing very well.

Another was a young professional lady whose widowed

mother depended upon her for support. Her self-denial was too much. She was ill for several weeks, and pennyless. Twenty dollars helped to pay her expenses until she was able to resume her labors again. She regards it as a debt, and will be glad to refund it.

Another was the widow of a high-minded and honorable Boston gentleman, eighty years at the present time. She is gentle and refined, but in very straitened circumstances. During the month of August she could not afford to taste meat. She was a recipient of twenty dollars.

Another was a school-teacher, the daughter of a clergyman, whose health failed her, and, being in debt, was told, if she did not pay it, she must leave the house.

There were thirty, in all, financially assisted during the last year, every one a worthy case.

CONTRIBUTORS.

Macullar, Parker, & Company	\$100 00
Mrs. Peter C. Brooks	200 00
Miss Florence Lyman	100 00
Lydia Maria Childs Fund (through Col. T. W. Higginson and Mrs. Livermore)	50 00
Mr. G. F. F. Read	50 00
Mr. R. M. Pulsifer & Company ("Boston Herald")	50 00
Mr. T. W. Peirce	50 00
Hon. Henry L. Pierce	50 00
Isaac Fenno & Company	50 00
G. H. (a friend)	30 00
Mr. George W. Sampson	25 00
Mrs. S. H.	25 00
Miss Josephine May	25 00
Mrs. John W. James	25 00
Mr. Joshua Merrill	40 00
Mrs. William Appleton	20 00
Cash	20 00
Mrs. John Felt Osgood	20 00
Cash	15 00

Cash	\$15 00
Mrs. C. F. A.	10 00
Rev. Samuel Devens	10 00
George W. Simmons & Company	10 00
Mr. Reynolds	10 00
Mrs. Edw. Tyler	10 00
From a gentleman (through Mayor Palmer)	10 00
Rhodes & Ripley	10 00
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	\$1,050 00
Balance left over from last year	\$80 00
From a fund to be used for extreme cases	320 00
A friend	75 00
Proceeds from fair and donations	504 00
To assist miscellaneous cases	215 00
Contributions	1,050 00
	<hr/>
Total	\$2,244 00

EXPENDITURES FROM MAY 30, 1882, TO MAY 30, 1883.

Rent	\$700 00
Labor	380 00
Furniture	85 75
Gas and fuel.	125 00
Water-tax	11 00
Contingent expenses	80 00
Printing	40 00
Personal expenses	53 75
Meat, vegetables, and groceries	504 00
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Total	\$1,979 50
Balance on hand	264 50

THE COMMITTEE OF THE FAIR TO RAISE FUNDS FOR FREE
DINNERS FOR WORKING-GIRLS OUT OF EMPLOYMENT.

President. — Hon. F. W. Bird.

Vice-Presidents. — Mr. S. R. Urbino and Miss Jennie Collins.

Secretary. — Miss Marie L. Pearsons.

Treasurer. — Mrs. John H. Pilsbury.

Executive Committee. — Mrs. William B. Smart, Mrs. S. R. Urbino, Carl Sheenhof, Miss Helen A. Russell, Mr. William B. Smart, Miss Chattie Bourne.

DONATIONS.

A. A. Walker, artists' materials.
 Mr. George Atkinson, 18 Summer Street, of Nonotuck Silk
 Company, fancy sewing-silks and mittens.
 Ward & Gay, 184 Devonshire Street, stationery.
 G. H. Green, 20 Winter Street, fancy-goods.
 S. R. Urbino, fancy articles.
 Prang & Company, 7 Park Street, chromos.
 William Wallace, jun., a supply of bread.
 Willimantic Cotton Company, a full case of thread.
 Mr. George Frost & Company, 287 Devonshire Street, a large
 assortment of underwear.
 Carter & Company, ink and mucilage.
 R. & J. Gilchrist, fancy-goods.
 Mrs. Henrietta Molineux, an oil-painting.
 Mr. Holt, an oil-painting.
 Almanacs from Mr. George Craft.
 A box of fancy articles from Mrs. Hannah Hunt.
 Bella Clifton, picture and fancy articles.
 Fancy articles from Mrs. Saulsbury.
 Fancy articles from Mrs. George Sampson of the Common-
 wealth Hotel.
 Fancy articles from Mrs. John H. Pilsbury.
 Photographs from Miss Marie Molineux, executed by herself.
 Fancy articles from Mrs. Fred Piper.
 Toilet set from Miss Marie L. Pearson.
 R. & J. Gilchrist, Winter Street.

 MRS. SMART'S REPORT.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE FAIR.

H. R. Plympton.	Mr. Schwarz.
J. D. Knowlton.	Mr. Butman.
Lemuel Caswell.	Walter Baker & Company.
Clark, Adams, & Clark.	J. H. Pray & Sons.
Chase & Sanborn.	John & James Dobson.

CASH CONTRIBUTORS TO THE FAIR.

Capt. J. P. Bradlee.	A. W. Spencer, Esq.
Hon. Henry L. Pierce.	Joshua Merrill, Esq.
George Hall, Esq.	John C. Paige, Esq.
Major Brooks.	John Spaulding, Esq.
Silas Gurney, Esq.	Jacob Pfaff, Esq.
David Nevins, Esq.	Mr. Hall.
Sheriff Clarke.	Mr. Rich.
Walter C. Shepard.	Harvey D. Parker.
J. L. Stevenson.	

Mrs. Smart wishes to tender her sincere thanks to her friends and patrons for their generosity.

IN CONCLUSION.

The most imperative duty of this rich, benevolent, and intelligent community is to make it possible for every able-bodied woman to earn more than two dollars and a half and three dollars per week, as she cannot retain her health and do a fair day's work on less than three meals. A little consideration will show how it can be done. It is an established fact, that rich people can afford to pay for expert laborers ; and that class of employees are not under consideration at this time.

Some years ago a lady school-teacher complained to me that a gentleman of the same profession received a larger salary than herself for no better work, and she considered it very unjust. I looked beyond for the effect, and found the master gave his trade to establishments that paid good wages, while the lady school-teacher patronized the very lowest paid class of workers. I carried my investigation still further, and in 1879 a wave of "retrenchment of taxes" passed over this community. From the judges down to the doorkeepers of the State House, the reduction was made, under a sadly mistaken idea of economy.

In less than three months it was felt in every avenue of trade. Interest was not paid on mortgages; the poor clerks could only afford to go to church where the preaching was free, and employ a doctor who never sent in a bill; the quantity of milk was reduced, and ice discontinued; they could not afford to have the streets watered in front of their houses. This retrenchment reached the dentists, the chiropodists, the grocers, and every individual who had any business transaction with them. So they were all driven *en masse* where they could patronize the parties who paid the poorest wages to the women. Before it was time to collect the next year's revenue, the graveyards, prisons, and almshouses began to fill. The dead could do no more work to help raise taxes, and the criminals and paupers had to be supported munificently by the State. The undeniable fact remains, that the compensation for mental work has not kept pace with the progress of the times. Heads of departments, book-keepers, and clerks receive the same salary they did twenty-five years ago, when the cost of living was half as much; and that is the reason one girl can make sixteen dollars easily, while another will have to work hard for two dollars and a half. The wages of the latter class is governed by the patronage of those who support themselves by labor of hand or brain, and whose best efforts are wasted contriving to make one dollar purchase the value of two.

JENNIE COLLINS,

BOFFIN'S BOWER, 1031 Washington Street.

